

The Rule  
of the  
Sisterhood  
of  
St. John the Evangelist



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# Constitutions.

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## Preamble.

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THE Sisterhood of St. John the Evangelist is established to minister to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant, to educate and train the young, and to help in missionary, parochial, and any needed work. It is subject to the canonical authorities of the Church.

## Title I. Members.

SECTION I. The Sisterhood shall be divided into three classes : Sisters, Probationers, and Associates.

The Sisters shall be of two kinds : those working together in community, and those engaged in outside work under authority.

SEC. 2. A candidate for probation shall not ordinarily be under twenty-three, nor over forty years of age. She must previously have been a regular communicant of some branch of the Anglican Church, must be free from binding claims, and possess such personal qualifications as may fit her for the work of

a Sister. She may, if expedient, be received to residence in community for a limited time, without in any manner implying thereby permanent relation to the Sisterhood.

SEC. 3. A Probationer is a candidate who has been formally accepted as such by the Visitor, or by the Presiding Superior or any Superior of the Order, with his approval. Probation shall ordinarily continue for two years, but may be prolonged at discretion of the proper authorities, or shortened to not less than one year. During this period the Probationer shall receive instruction, technical and religious, take part in the duties, and conform to the Rule of the Sisterhood. She may, however, be dismissed for grave cause by the Visitor.

SEC. 4. The Probationer having passed her probation with approval, and still desiring to give herself to the work, may be admitted as a Sister in one of two ways: (a) if for membership in a community, by election held in its Community Chapter, and confirmed by the Visitor; (b) if for work outside of community, by act of the Visitor, or of the Presiding Superior confirmed by him.

The Probationer shall then be received as a Sister of the Order, by the Visitor (or by a Bishop or Priest deputed by him), at a Service of the Church.

SEC. 5. It is supposed that every Sister will deliberately intend to devote herself to the service of the Sisterhood for life. Nevertheless, a Sister shall be free to withdraw from the Sisterhood after six months' notice to the Visitor (which time he may shorten if he thinks fit), provided that the reasons for such withdrawal be approved by the Visitor. He may also dismiss any Sister when, from improper conduct or from any other grave consideration, he shall deem such a measure necessary ; first, however, according her an opportunity for explanation or defense.

SEC. 6. Associates (who must be regular communicants of the Church), may be appointed by the Visitor, or by the Presiding Superior or any Superior, with his approval; and record of them shall be kept. They may resign at any time, or be removed for cause by the Visitor. Their work shall be subject to the clergy, under whom it is performed.

SEC. 7. Associates may give only a portion of time to the work. They may assist in any of the following, or in other ways :

- (1). To collect alms.
- (2). To procure work or clothing for the poor, and otherwise relieve need.
- (3). To minister to the sick.
- (4). To aid the Missionary Work of the Church.
- (5). To teach in Church schools, or in Sunday schools.
- (6). To aid the clergy in bringing forward and preparing candidates for holy baptism and confirmation.
- (7). To visit among strangers and gather attendants to Sunday school or to church.
- (8). To aid the Sisters in their personal labors, or to assist in the temporal support of the Sisterhood.

SEC. 8. Associates shall have the privilege of admission to chapel whenever desiring it, and shall be especially remembered in the prayers of the Sisters. They on their part are bound to offer up prayers for the pros-

perity of the Sisterhood, and in all proper ways to advance its interests. Though not bound by all the provisions of the Rule, they are recommended to study its spirit, and, so far as may be, to conform to its letter.

## Title II. Government.

SECTION 1. The government of the Sisterhood shall be vested in the Visitor, the Presiding Superior, and the General Chapter, in so far as specified in the Rule.

SEC. 2. The Visitor shall be elected by ballot, at a meeting of the General Chapter, after one month's notice given ; the appointment being confirmed by the Bishop of Long Island. He must be in Holy Orders, and shall hold office for five years, but may be repeatedly elected. The first Bishop of Long Island, founder of the Sisterhood, shall be the first Visitor, without limitations. During a vacancy in the office, an Acting Visitor may be elected to perform absolutely necessary functions only, for a time limited.

SEC. 3. The Presiding Superior shall be elected by ballot at a meeting of the General Chapter, after one month's notice given, the

election being confirmed by the Visitor. Any Sister of the Order shall be eligible to this office ; and if the Superior of a community be chosen, she may retain relation to her community unchanged. During a vacancy in the office, the Visitor may appoint one of the Community Superiors to perform the functions for a time limited, and until an election can be held.

The Presiding Superior shall be the executive of the Order, and shall enforce the decisions of the General Chapter. It shall be the duty of Superiors to report to her as may be needed, and to render counsel and advice individually or collectively when called upon. She shall see that the Rule of the Order (to which she herself is subject), is duly executed by Superiors, and shall report to the Visitor any Superior found lax in this respect. Her dealings shall be with the Superiors themselves, and not with those under their authority. Nevertheless, she may receive and (with approval of the Visitor), decide upon formal appeals in writing from any member of the Sisterhood. She shall stand in place of a Superior to Sisters and Probationers attached to no community.



SEC. 4. The General Chapter shall be composed of all the Sisters of the Order. The Presiding Superior shall preside when present, and other necessary officers may be elected for terms of three years. It shall be assembled at the call of the Visitor, or of the Presiding Superior, and shall be empowered (in subordination to the Rule), to consider matters affecting the entire Sisterhood, and to act on the same, subject to the Visitor's approval.

SEC. 5. Whenever it becomes desirable to establish branch houses or communities of the Sisterhood, these shall be governed by the Rule equally with the Mother House, and, if approved by the Visitor, may have a Superior and other officers of their own, and a Community Chapter regulating their local affairs. The Sisters shall be entitled, at their option, to attend, to send representatives from their number, or to vote by proxy, in the General Chapter of the Order.

SEC. 6. The Visitor shall appoint each Superior. But it shall be competent for the community concerned to convey its advice or wish on the subject, in the form of a bal-

lot. This ballot shall be taken in the Community Chapter, preceded by prayer, and without nomination or debate. Its result shall be known only to the Chaplain, who shall make report of the same to the Visitor.

SEC. 7. The Presiding Superior, and all Superiors, shall hold office for three years, unless sooner relieved by the Visitor. But they may always be reappointed.

SEC. 8. A Superior shall be especially charged with the care of her community, under the oversight of the Visitor, to whom she shall report as may be required. She shall faithfully warn the weak and encourage the desponding, and shall have in special solicitude the sick and afflicted members of the community. She shall avoid all partiality and favoritism in the discharge of her duties, striving to be in all things an ensample to the flock.

SEC. 9. A Superior shall jealously and sacredly guard and enforce the Rule ; to which she herself shall be subject equally with other Sisters. She shall be powerless to give any order which involves a breach of the Rule.

But she may, on grave and sufficient occasion, give temporary dispensation to individual Sisters from exact compliance with minor details. It belongs to her, moreover, to decide with all due moderation on matters affecting her community, not expressly defined in the Rule. The only appeal from her authority shall be to the Presiding Superior or to the Visitor, and shall not be lightly made.

SEC. 10. Annually, at a session of her Community Chapter, held on or soon after the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, the Superior may appoint an Assistant Superior, who shall take her place and duties on occasions of temporary absence or inability.

SEC. 11. Each Community Chapter shall meet on the first Thursday of the month, or within a week thereof. Special meetings may be called at any time by the Superior, and shall be called if written request be made by three Sisters of the community. The Superior may omit regular meetings at her discretion, but never more than two in succession.

A Secretary of the Chapter shall be annually elected at the session on or next after the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, who shall keep a careful record of all proceedings in a book provided for the purpose, to be preserved in the archives of the Order. She shall give timely notice of meeting to every member of the community.

None but the Sisters of the community shall be entitled to vote in Chapter, but the Probationers may attend, and (if expressly called upon by the Superior to do so), may briefly express opinion.

The Chapter shall be presided over by the Superior or, in her absence, by the Assistant Superior.

The powers of the Community Chapter are subordinate to those of the General Chapter, and are limited to conference and the making of minor regulations concerning the work and welfare of the community, save as elsewhere expressly provided in the Rule. Matters introduced merely for discussion or information, shall be decided upon by the Superior. In order to pass any measure, a two-third vote of those present shall be necessary. The Visitor shall have the gen-

eral right to revise or veto any action of the Chapter.

SEC. 12. The spiritual guidance of the Sisters and Probationers shall be in the hands of a Chaplain, who shall be appointed and be removable by the Bishop. He shall be entitled to a seat and voice in Chapter, without vote. He shall be free from interference in his pastoral relation, but shall not enjoin nor permit any course of action inconsistent with the Rule. He shall be under obligation, equally with all members, not to discuss private affairs of the Sisterhood with outsiders.

SEC. 13. The Common Fund of the Order shall consist of the stated contributions of the Sisters; of alms bestowed by any person upon the Sisterhood; of all bequests and legacies to the Sisterhood not specifically designated by the testators, and of all fees and remunerations received by any Sister or Probationer in recognition of her services as a member of the Order, or in recompense of the same. The Common Fund shall be in the custody of the Presiding Superior—or of a Treasurer duly elected by the Gen-

eral Chapter—who shall dispense it, subject to the direction or approval of the Visitor. Periodical account shall be rendered in the General Chapter. Each community may have a Common Fund in the custody of its own Superior, or elected Treasurer, under such limitation as the Visitor may prescribe.

SEC. 14. The Sisters shall willingly and thoroughly give themselves to any work which may be appointed to them by the Visitor, or by their Superior, subject to his approval; and shall undertake or relinquish work only with such direction and approval.

SEC. 15. A Sister, if engaged in a parish, shall work under the supervision of the incumbent of that parish. If engaged in any non-parochial labor outside of community, she shall work under the supervision of the Bishop, or of the Archdeacon or such clergyman as the Bishop may appoint. Sisters not of the community shall regularly report to the Presiding Superior once in three months or as required, either directly or through an authorized channel.

SEC. 16. A community member may be transferred to any community of the Order,

with the consent of its Superior and the approval of the Visitor ; or may cease to be a member of community in order to engage in work outside, with the latter's approval. A Sister, not a member of community, may become such by election, approved by the Visitor. No authorized change or transfer shall be regarded as complete until carried into effect by residence.

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### **Title III. Discipline.**

SECTION 1. The order of precedence among the Sisters, except as to holders of office, shall be that of the time of their admission to the Order.

SEC. 2. The dress of the Sisters shall be uniform, simple, and distinctive. That of Probationers shall be similar to it, but with a mark of difference.

SEC. 3. Every Sister, in proportion to her pecuniary ability, shall be expected to make stated contributions to the Common Fund, but no one shall be required to relinquish the control of property she may possess. Nevertheless, if having private income, she shall

apply to her personal uses only such a portion of the same as covers the necessary average expenditure of a Sister of the Order. Sisters may be admitted who have no means of support, if they are fitted for the purposes of the Sisterhood ; and they shall receive a sufficient fixed allowance for necessary expenses. But no distinction shall be made, and no information given, as to paying and non-paying members, or amounts paid, in order that absolute equality, save as to holders of office, may prevail among the Sisters.

SEC. 4. Intercourse and correspondence with relations shall be without surveillance. The private affairs of the Sisterhood shall not be topics of correspondence or discussion with outsiders.

SEC. 5. If any Sister have cause of complaint or discontent regarding any person or thing connected with the Sisterhood, it shall be mentioned only to her Superior. But the Chaplain may be consulted.

SEC. 6. The temporary absence of a Sister or Probationer from work, and the direction and purpose of such absence, must be previ-



ously approved—if a member of community, by her Superior; if not a member of community, by the Presiding Superior, or the clergyman under whom she is at work. Each Sister shall be entitled to an aggregate of one month in every year.

SEC. 7. Members of community shall have allotted to them a portion of time every day for retirement and devotion, and especially for self-examination as to their obedience to the Rule.

SEC. 8. There shall be set hours of religious Service in chapel or oratory. No member of community shall needlessly absent herself from any of these Services, and when lawfully detained shall excuse herself in person or by note to her Superior. When so detained, she shall be careful to observe the hour, by uniting herself in spirit with those who are then engaged in the direct worship of God.

SEC. 9. No public Offices of Worship or manuals of private devotion shall be used by the Sisterhood, except such as have the express sanction of the Bishop.

SEC. 10. Every Sister is bound to conform carefully and sacredly to the Rule, and to observe such regulations as may from time to time be adopted in the General Chapter, or in the Chapter of her community.

SEC. 11. The Rule shall in no wise be altered or added to, except by an affirmative ballot of two-thirds of the Sisters of the entire Order, taken after due discussion in two consecutive sessions of the General Chapter, and confirmed by the Bishop, in writing. A change so made shall have full force and become a part of the Rule, binding upon all.

# Internal Rule.

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## Title I. God and Self.

SECTION 1. The object in the work of the whole Sisterhood, and of each member of it, is to promote the praise and glory of God. To this end, the inner life and outward action of each member should spring from pure love of God, and be conformed to the example of Jesus Christ when upon earth.

SEC. 2. Make an offering of yourself to God, in this sense, as the first act at awaking in the morning and the last at night.

SEC. 3. It is necessary to devote much time to meditation upon the Mysteries of the Faith, and especially upon such as touch on the human life of Christ, and to exercise honest and devout self-examination and prayer.

SEC. 4. Be as exact in prayer, reading, and other spiritual exercises, as in taking your bodily nourishment. At the same time

cultivate quiet earnestness, and avoid mere formalism as a deadly foe.

SEC. 5. If hindered from acts of prayer at your regular hour, try, if possible, to find time for them afterwards. Never allow them to fall to neglect.

SEC. 6. Bear in mind the continual presence of God, and besides stated prayers, employ brief, silent ejaculations frequently during the day.

SEC. 7. Cultivate at all times reverence, but avoid display in devotions. No Sister shall of her own accord, and without express sanction of the Chaplain, practice any peculiar devotions or austerities over and above such as are common to all—to avoid any room for the growth of spiritual pride in doing more than others.

SEC. 8. In preparation for the Holy Eucharist seek (by contrition and prayer) special grace against besetting sin; and after the Sacrament watch and struggle against the same. Seek union with Christ in the Sacrament, that you may “dwell in Him, and He in you.”

SEC. 9. And because it is requisite that none should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience ; therefore, if there be any one who cannot quiet her own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let her come to the Chaplain or to some other discreet minister of God's word duly appointed for this purpose by the Bishop of the diocese, and open her grief, that by the ministry of God's Holy Word she may receive the benefit of absolution, together with godly counsel and advice, to the quieting of her conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.\*

SEC. 10. Temptation not being sin unless yielded to, do not be cast down by its presence—for even our Lord was “tempted in all points like as we are.” Regard it, as it is, a trial and test.

SEC. 11. Resist temptation steadily and firmly, but without disquiet, having full confidence in God, and remembering the powerlessness of the tempter if he have not an ally within. Distrust self, but put trust in God.

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\* From Exhortation in Communion Office of the Church of England, with only necessary adaptation.

SEC. 12. After a fall or fault, however often repeated, return instantly and trustingly to God ; make frank acknowledgment of error or sin, openly if against others, privately if concerning yourself—avoiding all excuses or self-exculpation.

SEC. 13. In repentance have confident belief that the sin will be pardoned, and that the pardon will be sealed in the next public absolution ; and then dismiss all such thought of the sin as may cause perplexity or hindrance of work in hand.

SEC. 14. Set yourself to do what before you had failed to do, and do it in the best manner that you can, having faith that God will supply defects.

SEC. 15. Desire to be divested of self-will and selfishness ; and with entire simplicity and humility seek to do the will of God.

SEC. 16. The spiritual attitude should be that of confident rejoicing in God ; and therefore religious melancholy should be steadily shunned as a mark of imperfect faith and love. True peace and loving joy in Christ, not a factitious and calculated

cheerfulness of manner, should be sought in prayer and communion with God.

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## **Title II. The Sisterhood.**

SECTION 1. Although kindness, justice, and courtesy towards others are Christian duties of universal application, yet their exercise towards members of the same Sisterhood is of more binding obligation. The closer the tie and the nearer the contact, the greater is the duty in these respects.

SEC. 2. Every occasion of being helpful and loving, without unnecessary officiousness, to those of the same Sisterhood, should be gladly seized.

SEC. 3. The formation of cliques or special friendships by Sisters, and the indulgence of favoritism in any shape, should be steadily resisted, as hurtful to the common life.

SEC. 4. All contentiousness and holding out for one's own rights should be sedulously avoided, and readiness to give way in everything not involving principle, should be habitually cultivated.

SEC. 5. Judge nothing rashly, hastily, or unkindly. Cultivate a spirit of Christ-like charity, which is "the very bond of peace and of all virtues." Bear gently and patiently with the faults of others, rather having a care to root out your own shortcomings.

SEC. 6. Pray for all members of the Order daily.

SEC. 7. The truest humility does not consist so often in taking the lowest place as in taking one's own place, whatever it may be, with neither shame nor pride.

SEC. 8. Towards the authorities of the Sisterhood and your Superior, let your attitude be one of loving and loyal respect. Receive their directions cheerfully and follow them faithfully, even when unwelcome or disagreeable. Never discuss their directions, canvass their motives, or throw disrespect on their authority. Believe that they have the good of the Order as much at heart as you can possibly have. Mention them always in your prayers.

SEC. 9. Refrain from all light, thoughtless, or censorious talk—commonly called gossip.



### Title III. Work.

SECTION 1. Bear in mind that every piece of work, whatever its nature, is done for God, and is therefore honorable and to be gladly performed, as an act of loyal service to Him.

SEC. 2. When directed to a certain work by the Visitor or Superior, or other recognized authority, never stop to argue the point. Do the work first, and argue about it, if necessary, afterwards.

SEC. 3. After a definite breakdown and failure, take the matter to God, and begin again, if the work be capable of renewal and no summons to work elsewhere be given.

SEC. 4. Be strictly and solicitously punctual in work and at meals, Services, and other stated times.

SEC. 5. Do all work as quickly as is consistent with doing it thoroughly well. But if the two be incompatible, put thoroughness in the first place.

SEC. 6. Do even the smallest and most trifling action so that it shall not go for

nothing, but be of use in God's service. Finish whatever is begun and do it in regular order, with due thought and method. Above all, never fuss, at any time or under any circumstances, but go calmly and collectedly to work.

SEC. 7. Never interfere with the work of other members of the Order, remembering that you are responsible only for your own work, and have no duty to look after that of another.

SEC. 8. Always support one another's authority, and never express unfavorable opinion of another member's work.

SEC. 9. If having occasion to give an order or direction in your own work, be careful that word and manner shall, under all circumstances, express gentle self-control.

SEC. 10. On commencing any work, and at its every stage, make an offering of it to God, and use short, silent prayers for help—working with God, as well as for God.

SEC. 11. As you will assuredly meet with many things to fret and try you in your

work, remember that you are not called to a life of self-pleasing, but to one of self-denial and self-discipline. Receive, therefore, all annoyances and vexations as so many opportunities for advancement in the holy life. Consider how "even Christ pleased not Himself," and that you are to take up your cross daily and follow Him.

SEC. 12. While shrinking from no really needful toil or exposure in God's service, avoid all unnecessary risk and exhaustion. And that for two reasons: First, God has intrusted only a certain quantity of health and strength to each person, and that must be economized, not squandered, that it may last as long as possible in His service; and next, because overdoing work may prove to be a piece of selfish wastefulness, obliging other members of the Order to add their worn out colleague's tasks to their own, and to nurse her besides, thus severely increasing the strain on the whole Sisterhood.

SEC. 13. Do not let work interfere with prayer, or prayer with work. Nevertheless, consider them not as antagonistic the one to the other; work for God being itself an act of worship.

SEC. 14. If sent to labor alone, in such a manner as to have but occasional opportunity for meeting with the Sisters, observe the Rule with no less care. Join spiritually in the prayers at the stated hours so far as may be, and remember the union of the whole Sisterhood in work with each of its members, and still more, the abiding presence of Christ.

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#### **Title IV. Recreation.**

SECTION 1. Recreation should be to the wearied mind what food is to the hungry body, and no one should make the time allotted to it a period of strain rather than refreshment.

SEC. 2. As members of community, though living together, are kept much apart from one another by daily duties, it is desirable that they should meet, so far as is practicable, in the common room for social intercourse during some part, at least, of the daily season of recreation. Otherwise the sense of family union is liable to be lost.

SEC. 3. Nevertheless, as temperaments vary, and as the change of occupation which brings rest to one person may fatigue another, no member of community should put restraint on others to employ their recreation time in any particular way, but leave them, so far as may be, to their own devices (so long as these do not trench on the rights of any other member, or offend against the Rule), and pass no judgment upon their choice.

SEC. 4. It is equally the business of each member of community to make recreation time pass pleasantly and healthfully, so as to be a cheerful and acceptable break in the labors of the day, promoting vigor and elasticity of the body and mind. And it is well not to discuss any matters of work during its continuance, leaving such for business hours or for Chapter.

SEC. 5. Such members of community as possess any distinctive tastes or accomplishments ought to devote some part of the recreation time to practicing them; first, because they are talents which should not be buried but utilized; next, because they help to

bring culture and refinement into the life of the community, and thus to lessen the power of narrowness or frivolity; lastly, because their results may in many cases, as in those of drawing, painting, modeling, carving, vestment making, embroidery, and the like, be properly sold for the benefit of the Sisterhood.

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## **Title V. Toward Them that are Without.**

SECTION 1. Toward persons not of the Sisterhood, but who are the special objects of its care and work, the most solicitous kindness, attention, and justice must be uniformly exhibited, since failure in these respects is to defeat one of the fundamental objects of the Sisterhood itself. And the moment such persons are treated merely as material from which spiritual advantages may be derived by members of the Order, all good works done for them become mere calculated selfishness, and are altogether alien to the law of charity.

SEC. 2. When a member of the Order is absent from work and temporarily a guest

or resident elsewhere, she should so demean herself, as the representative of the Sisterhood in that place for the time being, that nothing she says or does shall be capable of being construed in its disfavor. She must also guard herself against undue relaxation, on account of contact with those not bound as she is. Visits should ordinarily be limited to relatives.

SEC. 3. Avoid in all cases the assumption of airs of superiority over persons not members of the Sisterhood, and a habit of looking down on them as lower in spiritual rank and progress. This is not only often very far indeed from being the truth, but is a temper of mind directly provocative of corporate spiritual pride, which readily becomes personal, and is fatal to the higher life.